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SUBJECT: FM DOUSTE-BLAZY VISIT TO PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES  
AND ISRAEL

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: MFA officials offered a generally upbeat readout of FM Douste-Blazy's September 6-8 visit to Palestinian territories and Israel, during which he announced new French bilateral aid for Gaza, with a potential value of 40 million euros. Douste-Blazy stressed to Palestinian officials the need to meet security challenges, especially in the wake of the Musa Arafat assassination, which took place not far from where the French FM was staying. Douste-Blazy was sympathetic to Palestinian arguments that lack of lethal equipment hampered their capacity, and raised the issue with Israeli officials, who were unresponsive. Palestinian officials sought French support for maintaining international attention on Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and were reportedly pleased by public statements by the French FM reaffirming that Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem would form the basis of a future Palestinian state. Douste-Blazy was less responsive to a Palestinian appeal to revive a UNGA emergency special session, and counseled against the move on the basis of lack of EU consensus. PA President Abbas accepted a Chirac invitation to visit France, which MFA contacts say may take place as early as October. Although Douste-Blazy raised concerns over the security barrier and settlement expansion with Israeli officials, MFA officials stressed that the overall purpose of the Israel portion of Douste-Blazy's visit was to reinforce the new entente in French-Israeli relations. End summary.

2. (C) MFA desk officer for Palestinian issues Mariam Diallo briefed poloff on the September 6-8 visit of French FM Douste-Blazy to Palestinian territories and Israel, which she described as a success, despite the tensions created by the assassination of Presidential security adviser Musa Arafat shortly after the FM's arrival. While visiting Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem September 6-7, Douste-Blazy met with PA President Abbas, PM Ahmed Qorei, Deputy PM and Information Minister Nabil Sha'ath, FM Nasser al-Kidwa, Mustafa Barghouti and Sa'eb Erekat; in Israel on September 8 he met with PM Sharon, FM Shalom, and Deputy PM Shimon Peres, among others. Diallo was part of the MFA delegation which accompanied the minister.

PALESTINIAN MEETINGS: NEW ASSISTANCE, SECURITY, UN ACTION  
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3. (C) Diallo reported that the main objective of Douste-Blazy's visit, on the Palestinian side, was to confirm the GoF's intention to help accompany Gaza withdrawal and rebuild Palestinian economic and security capacity via bilateral and EU assistance. While in Gaza, the French FM announced several new French bilateral assistance projects for 2006, including a water treatment project, for which France would offer 12 million euros in financing (with another 25 million euros to be provided by the European Investment Bank); job creation programs, valued at 12 million euros; support for rebuilding Gaza City, also valued at 12 million euros; and smaller projects to include mental health programs for youth, training programs for doctors at Shifa hospital, and cooperation with social welfare NGO's. Douste-Blazy also confirmed French intent to assist in the rebuilding of Gaza port, and brought along a French ports expert to meet with Palestinian interlocutors. Diallo said the GoF had not committed to a specific sum on assisting port reconstruction and was still in reflection mode on issue. She summed up that the GoF planned some 40 million in bilateral assistance for the Palestinians in 2006, a significant increase from typical annual assistance levels of about 25 million euros. She also reiterated the GoF's full support for Quartet Special Envoy Wolfensohn's plan, a point made publicly by Douste-Blazy, who hailed Wolfensohn's "remarkable work" during a speech in Gaza.

4. (C) Another important aspect of Douste-Blazy's message to the Palestinians, according to Diallo, was to emphasize the urgent need for the PA to assert control over security in Gaza, its number one challenge in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal, which would also be a test of their credibility. The assassination of Musa Arafat, which took place shortly after the FM's late September 6 arrival in Gaza and within a few hundred meters from where he was overnighing, reinforced

the urgency of Douste-Blazy's message on security. Palestinian officials, in response, stressed that they had the men, but lacked the means on security, describing themselves as outgunned by criminal gangs and militant groups and seriously lacking in weapons and ammunition. Diallo said the French FM was sympathetic to the Palestinian argument, and later raised the issue with Israeli interlocutors, who were however unresponsive on the issue. Nevertheless, Diallo said the GoF hoped that Israel might show greater flexibility on allowing limited, controlled lethal equipment transfers to Palestinian security services in the context of the EU police training mission expected to begin in January 2006. She added that the GoF would likely contribute several officers to the mission, though no decisions had been made yet on numbers.

15. (C) Palestinian officials, for their part, stressed to Douste-Blazy their concerns over the Rafah crossing issue and the need for the international community to remain focused on the occupation of the West Bank, which could not be considered separately from Gaza. She said Palestinian officials were pleased by statements by the French FM describing the basis of a future Palestinian state as including the territory of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. The GoF also accepted the argument that Gaza should still be considered as occupied, and considers Gaza part of one entity with the West Bank under international law and the Oslo accords. (Note: The MFA spokesperson September 12, in response to a press question, reiterated that the GoF would continue to view Gaza as still under occupation until the final borders of a Palestinian state were resolved. End note.) On border control, Douste-Blazy floated the idea of having EU customs officials help monitor control of Gaza ports of entry as a compromise between Israeli and Palestinian views.

16. (C) Diallo reported that FM al-Kidwa in particular sought French support for reviving in October an UNGA emergency special session on Israeli activity in the West Bank, with another possible recourse to the International Court of Justice. Diallo reported that FM Douste-Blazy sought to dissuade the Palestinians from renewed UN action, arguing that lack of consensus, particularly within the EU, would show the Palestinian side to be losing votes. Despite the French discouragement, Diallo described the Palestinians as still attached to the idea of UN action.

17. (C) Diallo confirmed press reports that PA President Abbas had accepted an invitation from President Chirac to visit France; timing was unclear, but the visit could take place as early as October. Diallo commented that Abbas showed an encouraging evolution in his views of PM Sharon, whom he described as someone whose word can be trusted, though Sharon had not been saying anything encouraging lately. At the same time, Diallo described Abbas and other Palestinian officials as viewing themselves in a "race against time" to implement reforms, while the security barrier and annexations in East Jerusalem changed facts on the ground in the West Bank.

#### ISRAEL DISCUSSIONS: SECURITY BARRIER, SETTLEMENTS

18. (C) Although Diallo stressed that the Israel portion of visit was intended to reinforce the recent France-Israel rapprochement, she focused on the more contentious aspects of the FM's discussions with Israeli officials. She noted that the French FM raised the security barrier with Sharon and other Israeli officials, stressing the humanitarian repercussions. Diallo described Israeli officials as unmoved on humanitarian considerations and focused entirely on the security imperative behind the barrier, which they stressed was temporary in nature and could be dismantled at any point negotiations resumed. Diallo said GOI officials offered little response to Douste-Blazy's raising concerns on settlement expansion in the West Bank, beyond noting that there could be other withdrawals once the Palestinians showed that they could assume responsible control of what had been given to them. In this context, PM Sharon told the French FM that he was expecting 100 percent effort, if not necessarily 100 percent results, from the Palestinian side. Diallo described all of Douste-Blazy's official Israeli interlocutors, including Shimon Peres, as being discouraging on prospects for future territorial concessions in East Jerusalem and unified, in suggesting the likely eventual annexation of Maale Adumim.

#### COMMENT

19. (C) Diallo summed up that Douste-Blazy's visit to Gaza so soon after the departure of Israeli settlers, combined with the July PM Sharon visit to Paris on the eve of the launch of disengagement, meant that "France was back" on the international scene on Middle East peace issues. Other MFA officials have been more circumspect, with a more senior MFA official conceding to us on the eve of the FM's visit that

the GoF did not enjoy the same close relationship with Abbas as it had with Arafat. The same official complained that the current PA president was too focused on the U.S. and Russia, while overlooking Europe. The French invitation for Abbas to visit France will presumably seek to remedy this gap. For now, increased French activism on Israeli-Palestinian issues is not generating unhelpful initiatives, as the French are reiterating the need to support the Wolfensohn plan and re-energize the roadmap, and have toned down earlier calls for an international conference, which is no longer a GoF talking point. Meanwhile, the announcement of increased French bilateral assistance for Gaza is an encouraging development and long overdue. End comment.

STAPLETON